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AUTHOR Rosberg, William H.
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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses issues facing small and rural Iowa school districts that attempt to provide services for their gifted and talented students. Problems with transportation, personnel costs, and the small number of target students are cited, and enrichment program alternatives such as mentorships, educational programing from television and radio, video and audio cassettes, computer assisted instruction, and telephone network programing are proposed. Examples of Iowa programs designed to provide individualized activities are offered, including itinerant teacher programs, and projects enabling two way communication through cable television systems. The cost saving features of an interactive telephone system approach are noted. (CL)

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PROGRAMMING FOR THE TALENTED AND GIFTED STUDENT IN SMALL OR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

Dr. William H. Rosberg

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A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE IOWA ASSOCIATION FOR TALENTED AND GIFTED

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PROGRAMMING FOR THE TALENTED AND GIFTED STUDENT
IN SMALL OR RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

In 1980-81 Iowa had 443 school districts enrolling approximately 78,000 students. Of these 443 systems, 334 had 1000 students or less, 174 had 500 students or less. Obviously, the size of these districts, especially those with 500 or less students, will create problems in providing services to the talened and gifted.

The State of Iowa has developed its own definition of gifted education:

> Gifted Education shall be defined as those special instructional programs, supportive services, unique materials, learning settings, and other educational services which differentiate, supplement, and support the standard education program in meeting the needs of the gifted and talented (State Board of Public Instruction, 1974).

I shall use this definition as the basis for todays' discussion of the talented and gifted. As we examine our school districts, in numbers, we are probably talking about no more than three percent of our population that can be classified as talented and gifted

In a district with 500 students, we are looking at a total of possibly fifteen individuals, from age five through eighteen. They will have a wide with a variety of interests and abilities appropriate to the age range cited. We are not talking about compact districts at the edge of an urban area but frequently districts that cover a wide geographic area. Transportation costs and time cannot be ignored. Even if a "worthwhile" activity is scheduled it most frequently must

be a one-time activity. The problems of regular transport to conduct a class or extended enrichment activity can well require more expenditure than a district can afford in mileage costs, staff release time to accompany students, and overtime pay or extended contracts to cover Saturday assignments for such transport and activities.

Scheduling only school-day, school-time ,activities can cut personnel costs but require enough school to be missed by participants to create major problems for the gifted student. In addition, we are all aware of the problems an Iowa winter can create. Can we afford to gamble on the weather unnecssarily?

If "traditional" group activities are inappropriate, what can we do to provide enrichment programs for our talented and gifted students? Mentor relationships or individual activities are clearly appropriate but, are these enough? If we see as desireable the aggregation of talented and gifted children for group activities because of the benefits of peer exposure, or because the cost of providing a desired experience is too great for a few students, how do we provide for such experiences?

I would like first to examine some of the individualized activities available as alternatives first. One instructional mode that almost all school districts in Iowa now use is the Iowa Public Broadcasting Network. Use on a mentor or small group basis of IPBN programming with a group of gifted students can be quite effective. Programs such as

"Connections" or "Cosmos" can be used to advantage with any student group and provide resources that would normally be unavailable in any but the wealthiest and largest school systems.

National Public Radio can also be a resource. In our community, a NPR station will be carrying a series of one hour broadcasts on F. Scott Fitzgerald. It will be a series of eight nationally developed programs and three locally developed ones dealing with the life and times of Fitzgerald as seen by area residents. NPR and local affiliates have been doing more and more of this type of programming. This can obviously be a useful sort of activity in working with one or more talented or gifted students.

Videocassettes are becoming more and more useful as well. Not only can they be used to retain and study local events with students, but to allow better in-class scheduling of broadcast events. Be careful of copyright laws here! It is too easy to ignore them for educational purposes and to rationalize the value of the programming to our students but, by so doing, we encourage the same sort of academic dishonesty on their part. Videocassetes can be a real aid in programming but use must be monitored closely.

Much the same can be said about the use of audio cassettes. A good deal of excellent material is becoming available on audio cassette through media vendors and through public and private non-commercial radio stations such as the Pacifica Stations on the West coast. Again,

cautions about copyrignt are in order.

For years, we have had a variety of self-study materials available. In programming for the gifted, particularly when skill acquisition in a specific area is the goal, such self-study materials are a valuable resource that frequenly exists in your district or Area Education Agency library.

No examination of individualized materials would be complete today without mention of computer assisted instruction. You are all aware of sources for excellent educational software for a wide variety of machines whether micro, mini, or mainframe, from such non-profit distribution centers as The Minnesota Educational Consortium or Conduit, based at the University of Iowa.

All of the sources cited thus far are individualized, can be used with one or with just a few students and are probably within the means of most districts. All have the distinct disadvantage of limiting interaction between the instructor and the student. If we value that interaction, then none of the modes of instruction cited is, in and of itself, the solution to our problem. Let us turn next, therefore, to a series of instructional formats or modes that can allow for this interaction.

A form of instruction that is just becoming possible is interactive computer assisted instruction. Using microcomputers such as Apple or TRS 80, telephone modems now available at moderate cost (plans that allow construction by

any reasonably competent individual for under $50.00 are available) allow interaction between any two points directly or, for moderate membership and time charges, interactive tie-in to such services as "The Source", which can make a nation-wide range of experts and services available.

Telephone network programming is also a viable alternative. We have used the telephone as a communications tool for many years but we are just beginning to really see it as an instructional tool. The state of Wisconsin has been a national leader in such uses for many years. They have a state-wide telephone network system operated by the University of Wisconsin in cooperation with the County Extention Service in the state that provides line time for everything from non-credit meetings to courses carrying full graduate credit at the University. Here in Iowa, we have made several tentative beginnings in this direction. A state-wide group, the Iowa Association of Area School Boards maintains a statewide telephone conference system at this point. In addition, at least two of the Iowa Community Colleges maintain comprehensive telephone network systems, for teleconferencing within their service areas, thse are Iowa Western Community College at Council Bluffs and Kirkwood Community College at Cedar Rapids. The possibility of utilizing one of these systems, or of creating a system of your own is a real possibility for low cost aggregation of students from a wide area. Not only can such systems be used for instructional enrichment for the talented and

gifted but they may also be used to offer courses that you could otherwise not generate sufficient enrollment to justify such as advanced foreign language courses. At the end of todays' presentation, I will share a videotape with you that describes the nature of the telephone network system that has been in use at Kirkwood Community College. It may give you a few ideas about the operation of such systems.

The availability of televison as an instructional medium is increasing also. Within the state of Iowa, systems are now operational utilizing Instructional Fixed-Service Televison, which allows transmission of picture and voice one way, voice-only back, Microwave Televison which is a point-to-point broadcast system with picture and voice transmission in both directions, and cable televison systems. Cable televison is rapidly expanding across the state. Several systems in other states have the potential for two-way communication on their systems now. Others are in the process of examining this potential. Even assuming that such potential does not exist within your area, origination of a cable broadcast on several community systems at once on their educational channel is possible. It is also possible to utilize a Wide Area Telephone System (WATS) inbound number to allow for questions from viewers in a large geographic area. Telephones can be answered on camera by the instructor or in the control room and relayed to the instructor at appropriate breaks in the program and

answered by the teacher when it is convenient. Because educational access is required on most cable systems, you not only have the technology available, you are often encouraged and aided by the cable firm in making use of their system.

I would be remiss if I attempted to end a discussion of ongoing programs for the gifted without referring to the itinerant teacher program of several of the Area Education Agencies. Utilization of such a program or development of one can cut costs substantially below the cost of maintaining a full talented and gifted instructional program in your own district. Such programs will become more and more difficult to maintain however with increased travel and fringe benefit expenses as well as the higher outlay for staff salaries. Though such programs have been quite satisfactory in many areas, I suspect due to these costs that they will probably decline or at the very least, not expand in the forseeable future.

I want to stress that any multi-site instructional program will involve costs. Costs will be incurred for equipment, for space, and for staff. Based upon our experience at Kirkwood Community College in attempting to serve small groups of students at widely scattered locations, I suspect that the least-cost alternative in terms of start-up, equipment, and space costs may well be an interactive telephone system. The technology is available, we are all relatively comfortable with the telephone, and

the cost is moderate. In the time remaining to us today, I shall show you a videotape on a telephone network system, show you all samples of the needed or preferred hardware and attempt to answer any questions you may have about such systems or any of the other alternatives I have discussed this morning.

Thank you for your kind attention.

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